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UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
First regular session 1996
22-26 January 1996

FOR INFORMATION

STATEMENT OF THE LA LECHE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AT ITS FIRST REGULAR SESSION OF 1996

1. As a non-governmental organization (NGO) in consultative status with UNICEF, La Leche League International (LLLI) is committed to participating in the international efforts to promote, protect and support breast-feeding in keeping with the Innocenti Declaration, the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, the World Declaration and Plan for Action of the International Conference on Nutrition and, more recently, the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

2. LLLI was represented at the NGO Forum and the Fourth World Conference on Women by a delegation of three, who made presentations and participated in breast-feeding workshops.

3. It was extremely important that women representing mother-to-mother support for breast-feeding be present at the Forum and Conference. It was apparent from the many informal conversations that the need for breast-feeding information and support is a universal one. Women everywhere are still encountering barriers in their efforts to breast-feed their babies.

4. For this reason, LLLI applauds the recommendation of UNICEF in the health strategy adopted in 1995 to "promote actions for 'women's groups for women's health' to encourage the active involvement of women in the health system at the community level" (E/ICEF/1995/11/Rev.1). LLLI also applauds the continuing recognition by UNICEF of the important role of NGOs and of civil society in issues that affect women and children.

5. LLLI recommends to the Executive Board that its commitment to breast-feeding be reaffirmed in the report on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women (E/ICEF/1996/3) with the following amendments:

(a) Incorporate language from paragraph 106(w) in the Women and Health Section of the Beijing Platform for Action into paragraph 12 under section B, "Adolescent girls' and women's health", to read: "UNICEF will promote and ensure household and national food security, as appropriate, and implement programmes aimed at improving the nutritional status of all girls and women by implementing the commitments made in the Plan of Action of the International Conference on Nutrition";

/...

(b) Incorporate the text from paragraph 106(r) in the Women and Health Section of the Beijing Platform for Action, at the end of paragraph 3 in the same section to read: "UNICEF will also promote public information on the benefits of breast-feeding; examine ways and means of implementing fully the World Health Organization/UNICEF International Code on Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes; and enable mothers to breast-feed their infants by providing legal, economic, practical and emotional support."

6. In addition, LLLI is aware of the ever growing population of women and children in refugee and emergency situations and is concerned about the current status of support for breast-feeding women in these situations.

7. LLLI congratulates UNICEF for its response to the particular needs of women and children caught in emergencies, as evidenced in the report entitled "UNICEF emergency services: mission and strategies" (E/ICEF/1996/4).

8. LLLI recommends to the Executive Board that the document on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women (E/ICEF/1996/4) reflect the important role of breast-feeding and that the text protect the breast-feeding mother and baby during emergencies by adding the following suggested wording:

(a) In section V, paragraph 31 on "Health", the second sentence should be amended to read: "UNICEF gives particular emphasis to ensuring that children have access to basic health services, are protected from vaccine-preventable childhood diseases and benefit from prevention and treatment of diarrhoeal diseases, particularly through the promotion, protection and support of breast-feeding";

(b) In the same section, paragraph 32 on "Food and Nutrition", the last sentence should be amended to read: "UNICEF gives high priority to the promotion of household food security through selective inputs to enhance family food production, and through the promotion, protection and support of breast-feeding; it also supports income-generating activities for women.

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STATEMENT OF THE BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY
TO THE UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD AT ITS FIRST REGULAR SESSION OF 1996

Young Women of Wisdom

1. "In a better world - all people have equal opportunities to realize their potential through an educational process that has human, moral and spiritual values at its heart." (From The Global Vision Statement)

2. In some of the ancient traditions of the world, it is said that women are the guardians of culture, that they have the capacity not only to convert a house into a sweet home but also to transform a country into a strong nation. To meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, a new light needs to be shed on the concepts of social change and development. According the girl child her rightful share of human dignity and opportunity is a precondition for a stable and developing society. To encourage the growth of an individual's spiritual dignity, as a principle of lifelong learning, can expose and burn away the roots of the injustice of discrimination far more effectively than physical strength.

3. To eliminate gender discrimination and to ensure gender equality requires changing much more than just facts and figures. The correction of imbalances and the elimination of discrimination involve a process which takes into consideration the full growth of an individual. It has been seen that in areas where basic survival needs have been met, but the spiritual needs for safety, approval and acceptance have been neglected, the result was low self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence. Many young women whose basic survival needs have been provided for suffer the symptoms of unfulfilled spiritual needs, including fear, insecurity and anxiety. When these spiritual needs are satisfied, young women have the security and strength to move beyond their stereotyped images to a higher level of self-awareness. They are better able to listen and learn, to tap their potential and to be productive. Educating the girl child is not just an academic exercise, but means imbuing the family and community with wisdom. This wisdom in turn improves the quality of life and enriches the living environment, as actions based on wisdom manifest generosity, loyalty, understanding and public-spiritedness - values that give purpose and meaning to life.

4. Greater emphasis must be placed on the worth of the girl child. It must be recognized that her physical, intellectual and spiritual inviolability is an investment in the future of humanity. The welfare of all individuals, but particularly of girls, must be at the centre of legislative, institutional and administrative policies, structures and systems, and policy makers must ensure respect for the rights of the child. A social infrastructure of justice, responsibility and freedom, in which the rule of law is observed by and impartially applied to all, must be built. However, the ultimate guardian of the security of the individual and humanity is not the letter of the law, but the human spirit and conscience - the quiet voice that guides us and which, although it can be stifled, can never die.

5. Recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of the girl child is an intricate part of the ethical basis for democracy. In this interdependent world, the ideals of freedom and democracy do not exist in isolation, but in the context of the freedom and rights of others. Freedom carries with it the responsibility of recognizing and respecting the rights of others. Therefore, as we plan our programmes of action to make this world a better place, our rights must be balanced by conscience and duty, including the duty to preserve the dignity and respect of girls all over the world.

6. The Brahma Kumaris are actively involved in correcting the imbalance which exists through a value-based educational approach. This approach is built on the premise that there is a universal recognition of a hierarchy of values which ascends from the lower material values to those higher core values such as peace, love, care, selflessness and generosity. Such higher-order values transcend the uniqueness of humanity's richly diverse cultural, philosophical and social heritage, forming a common bedrock in one-on-one interactions.

7. "Cooperation in the Classroom", "Visions of a Better World" and "Living Values: A Guidebook" 1/ are tools which are being utilized by teachers in over 60 countries and which offer workshops and activities designed to help participants identify ways to "live" their values - at home, at work, at school, in the community and in the global neighbourhood. These processes are developed in a way which caters to a healthy educational and social environment and consistently encourages all human beings to foster moral and spiritual values as effective means to eliminate all causes of discrimination, corruption, violence and abuse. Girls and women are encouraged to play leading roles in both formal and informal ways of learning as means of self-empowerment in building self-confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance. Empowerment is not seen as a means to control or exert power over others, but as the pure expression of human potential and spiritual power. Such empowerment can develop strength and leadership in the powerless and inspire young girls to develop into "young women of wisdom" with clearly defined personal identities and a dignity that bestows faith and hope for the growth and development of future generations.

1/ These books are available among the publications on display.